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MAMAs reach out

By **THERESA HOGUE**
Gazette-Times reporter

Twenty-five years ago, in a cabin in Mosier, Sandee Burbank and a group of other mothers began talking about the futures they wanted for their children.

The discussion grew into a group called Mothers Against Misuse and Abuse (MAMA), a nonprofit organization whose members travel the state, hoping to educate Oregonians about what they say are the dangers of some widely used legal drugs and the misconceptions about some illegal drugs.



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Alice Ivany and Sandee Burbank listen as Jack Thomas tells his story about pain and medications, part of Mothers Against Abuse and Misuse outreach that focuses on education and personal decision making.

Burbank was joined by Alice Ivany and Jack Thomas on Tuesday afternoon at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library to discuss the group's approach to drug education, and to talk about the benefits of medical marijuana use.

As more and more federal money is being focused on hardcore illegal drugs, including methamphetamine, less is being targeted toward treatment of alcohol, which is a far more deadly drug, Burbank said. Nationally, 101,000 people per year die from alcohol abuse, while 17,000 die from all illegal drugs combined, she said.

"The issues in our family are with legal drugs," said Burbank, who had an uncle die of alcohol abuse and other relatives die from tobacco use.

MAMA works to avoid the fear-based approach of many drug prevention programs and focus on education and facts, Burbank said.

"We wanted some kind of different approach to teach our children and ourselves," she said.

Some drugs, such as marijuana, are demonized even though they have proven health benefits and a better safety record than some legal drugs, Burbank said.

Thomas and Ivany are both legal medical marijuana users, and talked about how they only came to use cannabis when their other options ran out.

Thomas said he suffered from severe nerve damage and intense pain, and years of ibuprofen use ended up destroying his stomach. Vioxx worked but was pulled of the market for safety issues, and Thomas said he was left with one viable choice, cannabis.

"I'm 57 and I still have to work," Thomas said. "I have such intense pain that I have chronic muscle spasms, so I do tinctures or tokes, it's gone and then I go back to work."

Ivany said that although her doctor recommended cannabis to treat pain, she was hesitant to use it because of the stigma involved.

"It was embarrassing to be reduced to cannabis," she said. "But it's not about getting high or stoned. It's an herbal treatment."

For more information, go to <http://mamas.org>